

House Bill 404
February 14, 2013
Presented by Jeff Hagener
House Fish, Wildlife and Parks Committee

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, my name is Jeff Hagener and I am the Director of Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks. I am here today to provide informational testimony on HB 404.

I recognize and understand that some legislators and members of the public have concerns about FWP's Habitat Montana program generally, and Department land acquisitions specifically. I want you to know that I am committed to addressing these issues, and that over the next year the Department will be developing a plan for how to meet its operations and maintenance needs on Department-owned land, re-assessing our habitat program objectives, and placing greater emphasis on the use conservation easements to conserve important habitat and provide hunting access. We also want to maintain the ability within Habitat Montana to acquire some key properties in fee title, although I expect this to be a less frequently used option.

HB 404 is a response to current concerns about Habitat Montana. It also provides a temporary funding source to help the Department address a shortfall in funding for block management.

I would ask that the committee consider changing the effective date to July 1, 2013 and the termination date to July 1, 2015. This would allow the Department to begin making these changes sooner, and also allow the Department more time to assess their effects and have that information available for the next legislature.

Finally, I'd like to thank Representative Flynn for his leadership on this issue, and thank the committee for the opportunity to appear before you today.